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THE FOX PATROL IN THE OPEN

A STORY FOR BOY SCOUTS.
C.L.GILMAN.

THE BUZZA COMPANY • MINNEAPOLIS



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THE FIRST TO MAKE
THE PASSAGE



The Fox Patrol in the Open

by C. L. GILMAN

Pictures by L. V. MERO



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To the most loyal comrade he has found on any trail, to the best companion who has ever shared his campfire—his WIFE—this book is dedicated with the homage of the author.

THE LAW.

*Now this is the Law of the Fighting Man,
Come down through the countless years,
"You must fight and work as best you can
That The Woman's life be free from fears."
For this your arm is muscled thick,
For this your courage blazes high,
For this your brain is cool and quick—
That The Woman's lips need breathe no sigh.
Whether it be in the slashing fight
Or in toil while slow Time creeps—
'Tis yours to guard while your eyes see light,
The Shrine that The Woman keeps.
Oh, the war is old as the Birth o' Things
And as new as the unpaced mile—
And men still toil for the Hand that Clings
As once they died for The Woman's smile.*

C. L. G.

FOREWORD.

Adventures abound everywhere for the adventuresome, and those of you who follow with me this trail of the Fox patrol, will see that those enterprising scouts have lost none of their facility for getting into trouble nor any of their pluck and ingenuity in getting out of it.

We will meet again that excellent organization, the Ojibway troop—would that we had time to know better the six patrols besides the Foxes who compose it—and encounter a new factor in the problem of every boy's life—the girl.

She is the keeper of that temple in which all that is most precious of all the things men have worked and fought and died for during ages beyond the counting of our histories are stored; a temple to be entered with reverence or not at all, lest the angry fires of outraged nature scorch body and soul of the one who dare profane it by lack of respect for its appointed keeper.

This is largely the story of how the scouts fought diverse foes to keep the girls under their care from harm; to make their way clear before them, to defend them in mortal peril and to shield them from hardship. And they play their part well, fulfilling the law that, while the breath remains in his body, an honorable man must work and fight to protect any woman in need of the strength and courage given him for that very purpose.

Now the time comes to leave for a while the trail of the Fox patrol. Perhaps, some other day, if you wish it, I will again open its log book and read you some more of the stories written there.

C. L. GILMAN.

Minneapolis, 1912.

The Fox Patrol in the Open

I.

HOSTILES ON THE TRAIL



CROCUSES a-bloom before Easter lured the Fox patrol to a strange trial by fire and snow one March morning.

It was an unnatural world into which Con Colville led his patrol, already famed for exploits on the river and in the woods. Though it was fully a month before the proper time for spring to begin in that northern state in which Saukville was situated, the trees were already putting out leaves for the second time and the purple flower with its heavy, hairy, green protective sheath was in bloom on the dry, sunny hillsides—the flower which we of the northwest mistakenly name the Mayflower.

A dry summer and fall had been followed by an almost snowless winter. Winds of unusual warmth ushered in the blustery month of March, dried the scant snow from the roots of sun-burned grass and blighted shrubs and tempted the trees, even the cautious oak, to unfold their first tender leaves.

Then came the cold, but without snow or rain, and the leaves were nipped in the bud. Again the warm wind blew and the feebler buds, which had been slow in awakening at the

treacherous summons of the unnatural heat and so escaped the following frost, began to unfold.

And the last year's grasses were dry, dry as the tinder which awaits the spark as the anxious scout plies his bow on the Indian friction drill intent upon making fire in primitive fashion.

Early as the Foxes were abroad there were others on the trail. As they swung across the bridge to the east side of the great river which split Saukville in two they were greeted by hoarse yells of defiance from the top of the hill beyond and knew that the "slabtown gang" was out again.

Now the "Slabtowns" were a source of endless amusement to the Foxes, as they were the cause of inward dread to most other patrols of Ojibway troop. The Foxes hid, fought or ran away—all seven as one scout—as suited the demands of the occasion.

Other patrols might be broken up and dealt with piece-meal but it was the Foxes, long staves leveled to the charge, who broke and scattered the yelling mob of "Slabtowns" which tried to break up the first public parade of the troop—bowled them over on their backs, scattered them when they tried to rally and finally drove them, breathless, to take refuge in their own quarter of the town.

Scouts of other patrols might be caught alone and beaten up with comfort and safety but that big, red-headed Nichols of the Foxes had knocked their ablest bruisers right and left and then run, yelping like a kicked dog—it was the "call of the Fox"—just out of their reach until he led them past an alley from which a well aimed volley of stones swept his pursuers fore and aft.

And it was Con Colville, leader of the Foxes—a great prize—left bound and gagged in the “gang’s” cherished shanty hidden in a ravine near the river bank, who clawed, bit and wriggled his way out of his bonds and then coolly postponed his get-away until he had set fire to the shack—monument to the gang’s sole spasm of industry.



So there was genuine hatred in the hoarse yells of defiance hurled at the little knot of scouts who wheeled sharply down river at a jog trot, apparently oblivious to the insults shouted after them.

Still, animosity ended with yelling, for, if the truth be told, the cigaret poisoned lungs of the gangsters were unequal to the task of overtaking the deep chested Foxes, even had the Slab-towns been minded to try another sample of the trouble—for them—which traveled under that yellow and green pennon.

While the Foxes are hiking on down the river, patrol ensign waving and that wise, fox-like dog, their mascot, swinging

his bushy tail like a drum-major's baton far ahead, let's take a look at this gang which disliked them so.

There were nearly a score of them, some ragged, some well dressed. Their ages ranged anywhere from sixteen to twenty and their badge was the sign of the yellow-stained finger tips. Taken one at a time they were not a bad looking lot. Some few had low foreheads, but the bull-dog jaw which is usually associated with that sign of a brutish nature was conspicuously lacking—bull dogs do not hunt in packs but have the courage to fight alone.

Just what this gang had against the scouts in the first place it would be hard to say. They professed to despise them as goody-goodys and mollycoddles—and yet the littlest scout of the troop had feats of physical endurance and dogged pluck to his credit which were beyond the courage, if not the strength, of the toughest gangster.

Probably they were actuated by that meanness of a weak and cowardly spirit which finds a sort of apology for its own failings in deriding the achievements of others. This had been strengthened by the denunciation of the whole scout movement by certain of their fathers who found in the manly independence and self-reliant industry of the scouts a stinging, though unspoken, rebuke of their own way of life.

Whatever the reason, they had started nearly a year before to pick trouble with Ojibway troop and—instead of being pleased and gratified at the promptness with which they had been accommodated—had gotten more soured and bitter with every reverse until the thought of "those dude tin soldiers" staled their cigarets, took their minds off the wild exploits of

“Frank Merriwell” and “Diamond Dick,” and generally poisoned their enjoyment of life.

Today, having gotten wind of the expedition of which the Foxes were the trail-blazers, they had resolved to hang on its flanks and spoil its pleasures. So, while the Foxes were traversing the path by the river’s edge at the “scout’s pace” of fifty steps walking and fifty steps runnings, which eat up the miles at the rate of five an hour, the Slabtowns alternately ran and slouched along the bluff which paralleled their course a quarter of a mile inland.

II.

CHOPPING A TRAIL.

"We ought to have stopped and chased those rough-necks back to Slabtown," declared Red Nichols, when the patrol halted for five minutes' rest after half-an-hour of hiking—"Rest before you get tired" was the rule which enabled the Foxes to make every trail they blazed a long one.

"Now they'll come snooping along behind and like as not jump that gang of girls and kids and take their lunch away from them."

"Couldn't do it," said Con. "Old Marcus"—affection and not disrespect was implied by this designation of Mr. Peters, their scoutmaster—"Old Marcus had me around at his room night before last and read me a long lecture on scrapping with the Slabtowns.

"Said that some of the scout council were complaining that we were stirring up trouble"—

"Stirring up trouble, the old women," snorted Red, "looks like stirring up trouble when a dozen of them jump on a fellow's neck when he stooping to tie up his shoe and then start to kick him when he's down."

"Aw, Red, you know you ought to have told 'em 'a scout is a friend to all' instead of breaking Tug Murphy's nose, and binging Chuck Smith in the eye and then leadin' those nice, kind, good little boys right where a lot of rough, rude Foxes were playin' duck on rock," laughed Phil Saunders.

"Well, just the same, fellows, some of the men on the council are kicking to Mr. Peters," continued Con. "Say that

our fighting back is contrary to the 'ethical principles of scouting' and that they are sure the Slabtowns wouldn't molest us if we weren't doing something to rile 'em. He hinted that some of them wanted me reduced to the ranks for setting fire to their rotten old shack.

"All the Slabtowns promised to do to me was to shave my head, take off my clothes and paint me green and then throw me through the window right in the middle of all those girls and women at the First Church chicken supper.

"An', before they went away, they broke my glasses, beat me up when I was tied and took my scout's badge away from me.

"I told Mr. Peters that and he wanted to know what I had done to make the Slabtowns so peevish and pretended to be surprised and shocked when I explained that I lit in with a club when I found five of them had caught Scout and taken him into that old cellar hole on the old Barnes lot and were going to pour kerosene on him and set it afire."

Here was cause enough for war. Scout, the little dog who had shared the beds and meals of the whole patrol on many a hike and in many a camp, the companion of their adventures on the Elbow River in the north woods, was as much a member of the patrol as any of



the eight boys. There was not one of them who would not have made battle with the whole Slabtown gang single-handed

in his defense. The story of how Con Colville had deliberately submitted to capture by the five toughs that he might lift the endangered pup out of the deep pit; how he had been seized, struck and dragged down while standing coolly with outstretched arm to enforce upon Scout's loyal little heart the command to "go home" was proudly recorded in picture and words in the patrol "log book."

"Yep," went on Con. "He told me that the way the Foxes ran after and persecuted those Slabtown kids was getting to be a scandal to the whole town and 'begged' that we would 'restrain our bellicose and pugnacious tendencies in the future for the good of ourselves, the troop and the scout movement.'

"Then he winked."

Laughing at this characteristic action on the part of the scoutmaster they respected and trusted, the Foxes scrambled to their feet, the five minutes rest done.

"Just the same," said "Marion" Gilmor, "I'm not stuck on this stunt of taking a bunch of girls out to pick May-flowers. It's all right for that kid sister of mine and the Henderson girls and Mary Nichols to get up these 'Girl Guides' if they would rather do that than have hen parties—but they ought to do their 'guiding' in the park instead of butting in on a troop hike like this."

This explains the mission which put the Foxes on the river path thus early. They were to go ahead, blaze a trail, locate the hillside, where the flowers grew in the greatest profusion and select a sheltered and pretty location for the noon-day halt and lunch. The rest of the troop, with a bevy of girls from the high school ostensibly bent on securing flowers but really

curious to see what this "scouting" which took so much of the time and interest of their boy friends was like, were to follow.

The usual path, along the strip of gravel beside the river, was under water, for the river was filled to the brim with melted snow from the forests and marshes many miles to the north. Its fringe of water-willows was half under water and the branches of those sturdy shrubs were bent and matted with bark, sticks, grass and other light drift brought down by the spring freshet which had swept the river free from ice.

Going was not bad on the dry turf at the top of the bank, but between the Foxes and the inland bluffs lay a low, ploughed field—a paste of mud with water drained from the high land around it.

But their progress was soon halted by a tangled thicket of prickly ash, the most vicious of all forest growths. To its right ran the swollen river and to its left, lay the field of mud. Left to themselves, the Foxes would have wallowed through the mud or paid toll of a few scratches and some torn clothing for a passage of the thicket.

"But those blame girls," said Tom Coleman, "won't want to get their tootsies dirty in the mud and it would take all day to untangle their skirts and hair if they tried to get through this prickly ash."

Cutting a trail wide enough to accommodate skirts and long hair through thirty yards of tangled thicket is either work or fun—as you take it.

To the Foxes it was the latter. Grasping a sapling as thick as a hoe handle with his left hand, Tom bent it sharply down and struck one blow on the tense side with his tomahawk-like

hatchet. Though the little tool weighed only fourteen ounces, the swift swing given its two-foot straight handle sent its keen edge through the wood fibers, strained so they parted at a touch, with a single blow. Tom turned and threw the tree with its hard, sharp thorns into the swirling water. As he did so, Ole Sorensen, hunting knife in hand, stepped into his place and severed another with two long, drawing cuts.

So they went at it, making the most of natural openings and stepping in turn into the rapidly lengthening tunnel as scout after scout backed out dragging his load of brush.

"Well this sure is worth chopping into," said Charlie McGregor, as they emerged at the far side of the thicket.

It surely was.

Giant elms, gray-green with their budding leaves, arched a path which wound through a wealth of lesser growth, likewise wearing the first, faint color of spring, to the shadow of a steep hill, so steep it might almost be termed a bluff, which rose squarely across their path.

It marked the point where the long bluff, a quarter of a mile inland, turned abruptly back to the river's edge. It was heavily wooded with massive butternuts, which were the haunt of many squirrels in the fall. At its foot ran the deep, narrow creek which drained the ploughed basin in ordinary seasons.

Now it was swollen with the murky backwater of the flooded river. Instead of a narrow creek which could be jumped by an active scout, or crossed on a foot log by the less vigorous, a stretch of water thirty yards wide and, as they knew, some eight feet deep against the farther bank, barred the progress of the Foxes.

III.

THE AMBUSCADE.

Here was a situation to test the pioneering skill of the Foxes.

For a hardy scout to cross, as did Eddie Austin, on a six-inch foot-log with three feet of water above it and four feet more below was a difficult, dangerous, but not impossible feat. For girls to do so, encumbered by skirts and unused to waist-deep wetting in water with the snow-chill still in it, was out of the question.

Eddie made an exploring trip inland, the reason of his hazardous crossing to the firm, dry footing of the steep bank, only to return with a report that the backwater had flooded clear into a marsh which lay next to the bluff.

They must either arrange a crossing where they were or abandon the trail they had picked, turning back half a mile to blaze another along the top of the inland bluff.

"If we were to fell this elm across the stream it would make a good foot-log," suggested Ole.

"All right," answered Mat Gilmor, "if it's your tree and you've got a grown-up ax."

That settled this suggestion. Even had they the tools for so big a job the Foxes were awake to the fact that trees were quite as much the property of the man who owned the land as his fences or his cows, and respected them accordingly.

"Mrs. Harmond told me," reflected Tom Coleman, recall-

ing their summer on the island with Mr. Harmond and his Ojibway wife, "that an Ojibway war party headed south was ambushed by the Dakotahs at this hill and fought here all night by moonlight, firing at the flash every time a Dakotah shot.

"She says, too, that if you come here the third night after the harvest moon is full and fire a rifle its flame will show you the ghosts of the 'Jibways socking it to the Dakotas just as they did over a hundred years ago."

"May be so, may be so, but I'd rather those Injuns would come along with a canoe when you whistled and take you across," said Phil Saunders. "If those redskins are bound to stick around here they might as well do something useful."

"Hi," hailed Eddie, "there's a bunch of logs floating in the backwater a hundred yards up stream. Let's build a raft and ferry them across."

Instantly belts were stripped off and poles cut to make a raft of most approved pattern. Regardless of the wet, the Foxes waded in and soon had a substantial three-log raft lashed together and floated down to the crossing point.

"This raft will only carry four," said Charlie McGregor. "It'll take two to pole it and that means only two girls can be taken across at a time. Let's make it a ferry."

This was easily done by attaching long ropes of wild grape vine to the raft at either end and securing them to trees at either side. It was now possible for the raft to be pulled across to the farther bank, loaded, and then pulled back empty, for another lot of passengers.

"Pretty good job, I call that," said Tom Coleman, surveying the work of the patrol with pride. "Guess those girls

will get some high-toned ideas of scouting when they come through that cleared trail and find this ferry waiting for them.

"Guess we'd better hurry on before they—Uh, what's up."

Scout was bounding down the hill toward them, his bushy tail between his legs, uttering yelps half of pain and half of defiance. A volley of stones kicked up the forest mould and thudded against the trees around him. As the Foxes crowded to the water's edge more stones, flung from the top of the bluff, splashed water in their faces.

Without an instant's hesitation the little dog plunged in, swam the creek and then, alternately shaking the water from his shaggy coat and stopping to bark a challenge, faced the crest from which he had so lately fled.



The Slabtowns, following the top of the long bluff, had arrived squarely opposite the Foxes just as their labors of chopping and ferry building were over.

Lacking discipline—which is but another word for self-control—they failed to lay a successful ambush. Two or three of their number could not miss the rare pleasure of stoning the little dog, with the result that they missed the bigger game which would have walked unsuspectingly among them in five minutes.

Nevertheless they barred the trail. To cross the open stretch of water and climb the steep bank under a hail of stones thrown by a party twice their number, was a desperate enterprise.

To turn back and meet the laughter of their fellow scouts and the still more dread derision of the girls; to abandon the work done with so much ingenuity and labor to the destructive hands of their enemies, would be humiliating in the extreme.

"We simply must not get into another scrap," declared Con, almost tearfully, to the hasty council of war. "If we do we'll have every knocker in town down on us, no matter how much in the right we are."



"That's right," added Tom Coleman. "Old Granny Duck-foot,"—an abusive but apt description of the most blatantly peaceful of their critics—"said at the last council meeting that if we would only ask the Slabtowns politely to let us alone, they'd do it."

"All right, we'll do it now," cried Con, stepping into the open and making the "peace-sign"—which even the most

savage races know and respect—by raising his right hand high in air, palm to the front, to show he carried no weapon.

Stones whizzed about him, coming straight as bullets and not in the pronounced curve of the thrown rock.

“Sling-shots,” was Red’s warning. It was true. Their enemies had resorted to the vicious combination of crotched stick and heavy rubber bands which sends a stone straight and swift with force enough to draw blood, and even to stun at short ranges.

Regardless of the storm of missiles singing about his head, Con stood motionless.

“Won’t you please stop and let us cross,” he hailed. “We mean no harm to you and we are on a public path through these woods.”

Derisive laughter, insults too dirty to remember, much less to print, and more stones were the answer to this pacific request.

IV.

BEATEN BACK.

Con turned contemptuously on his heel and walked slowly back, still under fire—but the range was too great for the light stones from the sling-shot, which pattered around him, to inflict great damage, even when they struck his back.

Trembling with wrath, which turned his freckled face white and brought tears to his eyes, Con unbuckled the belt which held his hatchet and hunting knife, rolled it up, stowed it in his pack and buckled it in beyond any possibility of reaching in a moment of passion, the weapons it supported.

"This is a free, public way which has been used ever since Indian times, and I have as much right on it as those toughs," he said. "I'm going across and I'm going up that hill, just as I have a right to, and they can do what they like about it."

It was a wild proposition and every one of Con's followers knew it. But they were loyal to their leader and would follow where he led regardless of risks. He had said nothing about their going with him but if Con Colville, gone suddenly crazy, was going to tackle such odds he would not face them alone.

"I counted them when we saw them on the hill," said Tom Coleman, aside, to Red Nichols, "there are fifteen of them."

"Well, laughed Red, "let's be glad there aren't twenty. Two to one isn't such bad odds."

Despite the righteous anger which led him, Con had not wholly lost his customary cunning. Unslinging his pack he

bound it tightly to his left arm—with its thick blanket, grub sack and cooking tins, it was an ample shield against any stone which could be shot from a sling or thrown with one hand.

His companions followed his example, even to the extent of putting all steel weapons beyond their reach. They knew that they were flying in the face of a strong faction of public opinion and that the use of any weapons other than those provided by nature would result in overwhelming condemnation.

Yet it is hardly in the nature of any red-blooded boy to tamely submit to injustice and insult, and in their hot hearts the Foxes felt that right and fairness would be on their side in the coming encounter.

Con, Red, Phil Saunders and McGregor, the last three the biggest members of the patrol, were the first to make the passage of the creek. Their packs, held above their heads, effectually warded off the stones which whizzed around them as Con hauled in, hand over hand, the rope fastened on the farther shore.

As their raft bumped, they sprang ashore and even as they did so, it started back for the remaining four, under the impulse of a strong pull from the shore behind them.

Now was the time when the Slabtowns, had they been well organized, might have fallen upon the divided patrol and inflicted upon it an overwhelming defeat. The four boys who crouched behind a butternut clump for shelter could not hope to stand against the united attack of fifteen assailants. They must surely be overcome before the raft could cross again with their small reinforcements, who could in turn be beaten down before they were fairly landed.

But the Slabtowns were not of the metal to stand even the little punishment this would entail—they preferred to wait in hiding behind logs and stumps at the top of the bluff for the attack to come to them.

Hardly had Eddie, Ole, Mat and Tom sprung ashore than Con, forgetful now of his intention to walk passively up the steep path and let the Slabtowns stone him if they dared, yelled:

“Charge.”

It is always a word to fire the most sluggish blood. To the maddened Foxes it brought a fury which they could not believe in calmer moments.

Up—up, they went. Clutching at trees and bushes to aid their climb; stumbling and digging their nails into the forest carpet of last year's dead leaves; holding their pack-sacks raised to protect their heads from the stones which rained around them; dodging behind trees; yelling in anger 'till they grew short of breath.

It was a mad and foolish charge, yet made with a high courage worthy the age of chivalry—and after all, the age of chivalry was but the boyhood of the world and lives again in every clean-minded high-spirited boy.

Faster and faster flew the stones. The range grew short. The Slabtowns were now certain of their aim. The tense rubber bands delivered their missiles with a force which blackened the flesh under clothing and drew blood from that exposed.

Without means of returning this fire, breathless, battered, bloody, the Foxes recoiled—as all merely human flesh must under such circumstances. Regretfully, sullenly, they slipped

from tree to tree in their slow retreat. Blood flowed from a ragged gash in Con Colville's cheek. Phil Saunders' right arm hung limp with the pain of a bruised shoulder. Not a scout of them but was marked with punishment.

Back they came, all but Ole Sorensen. There was that in his blood which set him stark mad once he was involved in combat. It carried him now straight up the bluff, regardless of stone after stone striking him, square into the thickest of the Slabtowns.

A dozen arms seized him and hurled him backward down the steep bank.

He rolled over and over, tearing up bushes and breaking branches in his efforts to check his fall.

This the remaining Foxes saw from the shelter of the clump of trees which had covered their landing and now their retreat.

Ole gained his feet and, screaming with rage, started once more to scramble up the bluff.

A stone from a sling-shot struck him and he fell limply backwards.

Then Con Colville did a deed such as wins the Medal of Honor or the Victoria Cross in combats which the world applauds.

Dashing from cover, he reached the prostrate body of his senseless comrade a scant second before a trio of Slabtowns from above.

Halting their rush by the sheer audacity of his counter attack, he bent, lifted Ole's limp body across his shoulders and turned toward his comrades.

No spirit of chivalry restrained his assailants. A blow from behind drove Con to his knees. Hampered by his helpless



HE LIFTED HIS COM-
RADES LIMP BODY



burden he could neither rise nor ward off the kicks and blows directed at the conscious and unconscious scout alike.

His friends were coming, but all but one were too slow.

Eyes flashing green fire, body quivering with anger, Scout hurled himself into the fray.

Well for the little dog that day that wolf rather than bulldog blood coursed through his loyal veins.

No setting his teeth and hanging on lay in his inherited fighting tactics. A jump in, a snap of sharp fangs and a jump out before kick or blow could reach him; now a lunge at a leg; now a spring at a throat—and with it all the screaming snarl of the fighting wolf which carried as much terror as did his teeth.

It lasted but a moment.

A rush by Red and Charlie drove back Con's demoralized assailants while Eddie and Tom dragged rescuer and rescued back to safety.

It was Scout's wet tongue licking the blood from the wound on his cheek which awoke Con to consciousness again.

A pair of loving, brown eyes, quite different from those green ones of the yellow, fighting-demons, who had come to his rescue in the nick of time, looked into his and Scout's wagging tail seemed to say:

"Just a little return for your help in that torture pit, my comrade."

Con looked around.

Ole lay beside him, very still and white. Eddie Austin was writhing with the deadly pain of a blow in the pit of the stomach. Tom hurried past him to the firing line beyond, his hat full of stones gathered at the river's brink.

V.

AN UNEXPECTED VICTORY.

Con took one look at the harm his mad anger had caused and then buried his face in his hands while hot tears of shame coursed down his cheeks.

It was so the four uninjured Foxes found him when they returned triumphant from repulsing an attempt of the Slabtowns to follow up their advantage by crossing the creek. The Slabtowns were not the sort who dare face equal numbers and a very short look at the four determined foes to whom they must cross four at a time satisfied them about crossing while a few rocks, sped by Charlie McGregor's famous "pitching wing," taught them the natural beauties and advantages of their original lines at the top of the bluff.

"Boys," said Con's broken voice. "I didn't have any business leading you into it. Ole's dead—"



"Naw, he ain't," came Red's reassurance. "Just suffering from a rush of Norwegian blood to the brain complicated by a biff on the coco which didn't even raise a lump under his hat and that straw thatch of his."

"and Eddie," continued Con's self-accusation, "is—"

"Sitting up and rubbing arnica on his little tummy," was Eddie's completion of the sentence.

"and Old Marcus and the troop will come up and find us treed here and know we've been fighting again. I wouldn't care if that meant just tying the can to me, but they'll fire the whole Fox patrol.

"And it's all my blame fool fault and the Slabtowns will crow over us the rest of our lives."

"Crow! Not that bunch of dubs," said Red, with a grin of pleasant recollection.

"You were asleep and missed a most enjoyable party just at the far edge of the creek.

"We had 'em where we wanted 'em for five minutes there—right at arm's length—and what we gave 'em was a-plenty. They're the sickest bunch of Unhappy Hooligans that ever wore black eyes.

"Why, if you and Ole had been in the game, we'd have put that gang out of business for keeps. They finally ran away and didn't come back 'till they saw us safe on this side of the water.

"As for anybody finding out about this very pleasant time we've had"—and Red's smile was one of bliss unalloyed though blood trickled from a split lip and one eye was turning purple—"we'll fool 'em. The picnic wasn't scheduled to start

from the school house until ten. It's only a quarter after now, and that means they won't be here for an hour.

"We'll be half way down to Aunty Gwendolyn's by then and between her Injun herbs and the make-up box Elizabeth Bites-a-Bear Harmond forgot when she went back to Carlisle and her dramatic club last fall, it'll be a pity if we don't show pretty faces when we show up again—"

"But I'll have to report this to Mr. Peters anyhow," put in Con.

"Sure, but what you report to Old Marcus, and what the whole troop blabs to the whole town are mighty different things. He'll see our side and act square so long as a lot of old women on the council don't order him to act ugly."



OLD MARCUS

Con's humiliation was not lightened, but this wise and kindly counsel enabled him to set it aside and turn his attention to the work at hand. He directed that each scout cut a stout club, three feet long, to be carried in his left hand until close quarters were gained, and that each fill the pockets in reach of his right hand with stones. All were to use their packs as shields, as in the first disastrous attempt.

The orders were given by Con, but the suggestions were Red's.

Eddie cut his sapling to a six-

foot instead of a three-foot length and a secret, sickening fear in the hearts of his comrades went to sleep forever as he drew the crumpled patrol pennon from the pocket into which he had thrust it when he stripped it from the staff torn from his hands by the Slabtowns, and tied the cherished green and yellow totem to its new staff.

Deliberately, coolly, the Foxes crossed the creek for a second attack. There was no mad rush as the first time, but instead, a slow, determined advance.

No hostile yell, not even a stone greeted their attack.

Unmolested, they wound their way up the zig-zag path to see, on crowning the bluff, the Slabtowns in panic-stricken flight a quarter of a mile before them.

Shaken by the punishment they had received at close quarters, with no confidence in the courage of themselves or their comrades, the toughs viewed the return of the Foxes to the attack after the suffering of their first disaster, as something unnatural and therefore to be dreaded.

In the quiet resolution of their foes they saw not courage but the confidence of superior strength—perhaps it meant reinforcements, perhaps firearms—in either case no gangster cared to stay and find out alone, and not one of them trusted a single companion to stick with him.

It is the way of mobs, toughs and savages.

It was with the memory of this encounter in his mind that the Rev. Redmond Percy Nichols, missionary of the gospel to the Igorotes, the deadly virus of a poisoned arrow stealing through his veins, led, in after years, his dusky converts to a second charge against still more savage head-hunters and heard

their voices raised in a hymn of thanksgiving that they, their women and their little ones had been saved from cruel death or crueller captivity before the poison stilled his heart—hymns which quickly changed to wails of barbaric mourning for the knightly churchman who had first taught them how a good man should live and then shown them how a brave man can die.

VI.

MR. PETERS TRIUMPHANT.

Mat Gilmor was in his element.

He was sitting on his heels before just the right sort of a fire—a fire built of dry hardwood which gave off intense heat but little smoke. Not a stick of it was so thick that it could not be broken in the bare hands, or longer than the distance from a scout's elbow to his finger tips. A neat pile of similar fuel lay in reach of his left hand and Red Nichols, Con Colville and Ole Sorensen were busy rustling for more. Phil Saunders and Eddie Austin were delegated to bring water from the river. Tom Coleman, cookee, stood ready to obey Mat's slightest order.

Mat was the cook of the Foxes—and proud of it.

He had an audience to tempt his skill to the utmost, a bevy



of girls crowding close on either hand or daring the stinging smoke to the leeward of the fire in their efforts to see how a mere boy could prepare a hearty, appetizing meal with only the rude utensils of those who "go light," helped out by woods makeshifts.

The plan of the Foxes to press on down river and stay out of sight until they could remove from their faces and clothes the signs of battle had been frustrated.

Attempting to stick close to the river's edge, they found what they had always known as a meadow changed by the high water, into a marsh which, judging from the known extent of low land, must reach for nearly a mile down the river.

Retracing their steps to seek feasible going further inland they had run squarely into Mr. Peters and the advance patrols of the picnic party pressing more closely on their trail than they anticipated.

Bruises and blood-stains confirmed for Mr. Peters the hints he had taken from the torn up ground and scattered stones he had seen just beyond the ferry. He made no comment while the girls and scouts of the picnic party were near, but joined himself to the Foxes, who still kept the lead, and walked with Con, to hear his report.

Without attempting to conceal anything, Con told the whole story, from the time Scout's retreat gave them warning, to the moment the Foxes reached the top of the bluff to find their assailants fleeing in panic. He accepted without reservation all the blame for the encounter and then waited the words of condemnation which he felt his due.

To his surprise, they did not come.

"You explained to the Slabtowns that you did not intend to interfere with them and demanded free passage on a public path?" Mr. Peters asked.

"Yes."

"And you simply went across and started up the bluff without throwing any stones or making any threats?"

"Well, we didn't manage to do anything or didn't threaten to do anything—but I guess we would have tackled them if we had reached the top. When the stones began to hit us we got plenty mad."

"But you didn't throw a stone or strike a blow except to repel an attack you couldn't escape—all the fighting you did was in defense of yourselves?"

"Yes, that's a fact," said Con.

"Could you identify any of the gang which attacked you?" was the next question.

"I guess that among us we could name all of them."

"Then, by ginger"—Mr. Peter's one and only expletive—"this is the last time that Slabtown gang will attack any of my scouts.

"We've got 'em where we want 'em, Con. They made the mistake of their lives when they assaulted you boys south of that granite block below the bridge. That block not only marks the city limits, but the southern boundary of Green county as well.

"The Saukville police won't touch any of the boys in that gang because 'Tug' Murphy's father is the boss who made our mayor. But his pull don't run down here.

"We're in Pike township of Johnston county, where Henry

Carter is justice of the peace—and Henry Carter is our friend Mr. Harmond's son-in-law."

Mr. Peters chuckled softly to himself as he mapped out a legal campaign which ended with every one of the Slabtowns under a jail sentence, suspended for so long as the boys served as scouts under Mr. Peters.

Which was the origin of the second Saukville troop, known as the Dakotahs, in memory of that fierce battle at the ford; a troop which, however unwillingly it came into existence, developed into as wiry and enterprising a bunch as ever slung packsacks and started on a hike.

This is how it happened that the Foxes, somewhat freshened up, but with not a few plastered cuts and purple bruises to cause wondering comment, waited at the site they selected for a noon halt and joined in the pleasant relaxation of one of the first genuine scout picnics on record.

VII.

WALLED IN BY FIRE.

"Tea, coffee or cocoa?" said Mat Gilmor to the group of girls around his cooking fire.

"Fiddle-sticks," said his sister Ellen, "You're a great cook, you are. You've only got one pail to make all three in, and that's only got boiling water in it."

"Go on, name your poison, and I'll have it ready in one minute. Tea? Oh, very well, then, pass up your cup."

Mat lifted the lid of his pail of boiling water, using the forked end of his "kettle" lifter, cut from a bush five minutes before by Tom, to take hold of its hot knob and filled the cup with clear, hot water.

"Tea bag," he said, and Tom handed him a bit of tea as big as a walnut, tied up in a clean cotton rag with a long string attached.

"Leave it in, sis, 'till the color suits you," Mat said, dropping this contrivance into the cup, "then haul out the tea by the string, add sugar from this sack, and drink it."

To make cocoa for Beth Henderson was, of course, a simple matter. Mary Nichols' coffee involved a resort to a small can of patent coffee powder, half a teaspoonful of which, dissolved in a cup of hot water, turned the trick.

Refilling the hot water pail from the pail of fresh water brought from the river by the "water rustlers," was Tom's task. He also was charged with occasionally stirring the pail in which

the pea and meat meal, known as Erbswurst, was slowly simmering to a thick, nutritious soup.

The twenty minutes required to cook this important part of the meal over, Tom picked up the kettle lifter and hooked the stub of a branch left at the end opposite to the crotch "lid lifter" under the bail, swung it dexterously from the wooden crane where it hung above the fire, and began filling the cups, which the girls thrust eagerly toward him, with the savory mess.

Mat was very busy making corn pone, keeping two frying pans going at once. Into the sizzling grease left by frying bacon, fished out and kept warm on a plate beside the fire, he poured the thick, yellow batter, patted it flat and thin with a spoon, covered the frying pan with a tin plate and set it upon a bed of glowing embers raked to one side of the fire—for the secret of making good corn pone is to let it cook slowly, that it may be done in the center and yet not burned on the outside.

Mat's work was rendered easy by the fact that he made up his corn pone mixture at home—following a recipe discovered in the pages of *Outing*—and carried it a-field all ready to add water 'till a thick batter was secured, and bake. His proportions were: 2 quarts of corn meal, 1 quart of white flour, 1 cup of sugar, 2 teaspoonfuls of salt and 8 teaspoonfuls of baking powder.

Properly cooked, this made a rich, toothsome cake. The bacon grease in which it was baked made butter unnecessary and, served with crisp slices of bacon and backed by rich pea soup, it made a meal on which the scouts of the Fox patrol were able to travel fast and far.

"Well, it's certainly good," was Ellen Gilmor's verdict on her brother's cookery, "but I should think you would get tired of all this work when you might just as well get mother to bake you some Johnny cake and carry it with you."

"That's what they all say," said Con, "until they take the long trail. You see, it's this way, Johnny cake is about seventenths water. If you are only going to need a pound of it, why you might as well take it out ready made, but suppose you are going to be gone long enough to need ten pounds—then you would be carrying seven pounds of water.

"So on a long trip, it's better to carry three pounds of corn meal and add the water when you need it."

Con had an interested and an interesting audience, and there's no telling how long he might have held forth on his favorite subject of "going light" had not the troop bugle blown the assembly.

From their scattered patrol camp fires the girls and scouts gathered to the central council fire kindled in a sheltered hollow well down the long, narrow point to which the Foxes had guided the party.

It was an ideal location for a picnic camp. Tall elms and butternuts rose on all sides. A knee-deep growth of heavy woods fern, still standing in thick, russet ranks where it had been killed by the fall frost, covered the earth save where it had been cleared away and gathered in great armfulls to furnish seats for the girls while they looked on at the various feats of strength and skill attempted by the scouts for their entertainment.

These passed off as scout games do, with keen rivalry while they lasted, and hearty cheers for the winners at the end.



HE LIFTED THE SHIVERING
GIRL AND STARTED FORWARD



The big fire gave a welcome heat, for the sky, clear when the day began, was overcast with dull, gray clouds, and the wind, shifted to the north, was bitter cold. Those scouts who had brought full packs, got out their blankets and distributed them among the girls, many of whom were hardly dressed for roughing it.

"Who would have thought it would have turned out so cold," said Mary Nichols, as she wrapped Phil Saunders' blanket around her.

"There's a smell of snow in the air," said Phil, and turned to sniff the wind for a fuller confirmation of his prophecy.

"There's snow in it," he said, "and smoke."

Charlie McGregor joined him.

"Winter's coming back all right," was his verdict. "Shouldn't wonder if we had a blizzard by night. You're right about smoke, too. That's strange; our's was the only cooking fire to windward of here and Ole and I soused it with water and then piled dirt on it.

"Let's take a look for that smoke—everything's dry as tinder and a brush fire wouldn't do a thing but run before this wind.

"Come on, girls, and do a little real scouting. You won't see much here anyhow, and we'll show you a little genuine work."

Nothing loath, the four girls, Mat's sister, the Hendersons and Mary Nichols, rose and followed Charlie, Phil and Eddie, who were already started up the slope. Out of the corner of his eye Con saw the maneuver. He was one of those entered in the hatchet throwing contest and stood a good

chance to win—but what was that to showing Ellen Gilmor the way through the woods, perhaps even speaking to her.



Con's courage was good enough when it came to a clash with the Slabtowns, it had been tested when he led the Foxes through the dismal swamps of the Bass Lake region on the trail of the yeggmen who held Scoutmaster Peters a prisoner—but it failed utterly when it came to facing Mat Gilmor's black-eyed sister.

For this very reason the slender, dark-haired girl was to him the most interesting person in the world. Here on his own ground and on his own subject he had already been able to address her and perhaps another opportunity would offer.

This flashed through his mind as he was called to toe the line, and without a moment's hesitation he took careful aim and cast his tomahawk true to the mark he had selected—a slender sapling a good two feet to one side and a dozen beyond the dead trunk which was the official target.

Without heeding the laughter which hailed his intentional failure, which threw him out of the contest, he recovered his ax and sped away in the wake of the scouting party.

Two minutes later he stood panting beside them to contemplate a sight at once so beautiful and so terrible as to make him forget his grim resolve to speak to Ellen again though it choked him.

The whole of the cut-over ground inland from the point upon which the camp was located was in flames. The dead leaves on the oak scrub which replaced the forest growth sent their flames sky-ward, underneath the smaller bushes and the dead grass burned fiercely.

Eddie Austin dashed up out of the smoke.

"The fire has reached the upper side of the point," he gasped. "There's no getting away there."

Hand over hand, Charlie hoisted himself into the upper branches of a tall tree.

"The grass is on fire down river," he called.

VIII.

THE FIGHTING LINE.

The whole Ojibway troop and the young women and girls in its care were cut off on the long, narrow point made by the river's turning back upon itself.

On two sides of them the river in full flood forbade retreat. Escape landward was cut off by a leaping wall of fire.

"Once in this fern, it'll sweep the whole point, exclaimed Phil.

Con set his whistle to his lips and blew:

One long blast—"attention."

"Attention," again and again.

Many blasts, long, short, long, short, while his breath lasted—"danger, rally."

Then a success of short, sharp blasts—"come here."

Hardly had he ceased before the crashing of the brush behind them told the little party that the troop was rushing to the rescue.

Mr. Peters took command:

"All you girls run back to the council fire and wait. Gather up everything lying around loose and cram it into the pack-sacks. Get everything in shape so we can carry it away.

"Gophers," he shouted, "get to work at the left. Panthers next. Squirrels, Doves, Wolves, Rabbits.

"Fight back the fire when it tries to cross this wagon track.

"We must make our stand here for if it gets across it will sweep the fern and brush to the end of the point and there will be no saving the girls.

"Con, you and the Foxes skirt the point and see if there is any way of getting them off of it."

These were the general orders for a battle as grim as any ever waged between human foes.

Only a dim wagon track, grown over with grass, separated the heavy, inflammable fern growth from the brush fire raging toward it.

Here the troop must make its stand and beat back the flames.

Upon the Gophers the fire descended first.

Sparks blown before the wind set the fern afire behind them and they leaped to beat out the blaze with their coats, soaked with water from the river.

Little patches of fire, driven forward by the blast of the main conflagration, raced across the wagon track to be trampled and beaten out before they reached the fern.

The hot, acid smoke of burning leaves stung their eyes and seared their throats—their very lungs felt full of ashes.

Only their position by the river gave them a slight advantage—they were able to souse the coats with which they fought in the water while the patrols further inland—now engaged with the advance skirmishers of the fire—must fight with dry weapons.

"Fatty Felix," leader of the Gophers, raged in the van.

"Sock it to it," he yelled. "Stone-wall. Hold 'em."

Then, to Louis Kaiser, leader of the Panthers:

"Don't need help here. Hold your own line."

A clump of dead birch trees caught fire in front of him and the flames flashed over him, singeing the hair from his head, but he fought on regardless, beating at the smoldering fern.

No more rushing to the river to wet coats now, the attack was too fast and furious.

Slowly the fire burned out in the brush before the Gophers, but now the Panthers were hotly engaged and, on their right, the Squirrels were chopping desperately to clear away a clump of sumac, ready to burn like gun powder, which rendered their part of the line particularly weak.

Up and down the whole front Scoutmaster Peters ran and shouted.

Here a word to encourage the hard-pressed Panthers.

There a pause to direct the chopping of the Squirrels.

Again a halt to advise the leaders of the Wolves and Rabbits to detail a scout each to run back and forth to the water's edge, exchanging wet coats for dry.



Over all the smoke and sparks hung in a thick cloud, obscuring the leaden sky, and the heat waves concealed the chill of the north wind.

Into this confusion Con plunged to find and report to Mr. Peters.

"No chance to escape, sir," he shouted above the roar of the approaching flames.

"The river is up to the very top of the bank and every log has been floated off down river.

"But I believe we can burn off the fern from the hollow where we made the council fire down to the end of the point. That will give us a chance to escape."

Mr. Peters approved this plan:

"We'll hold this road as long as we can and trust that when we are driven back you will have a safe place burned off for us."

Con's plan was simple enough.

It was to scorch the down-wind end of the point free of inflammable stuff, leaving a space offering no fuel to the flames to which the troop and the girls might retreat.

He dashed back, noting as he did so, a dozen places where sparks carried by the wind over the heads of the fighting line had started little detached fires behind them.

To Mrs. Coleman, Tom's mother, who had come out as chaperone to the girls, he explained the part which she and her charges must play. They were to gather up all luggage and move closer to the fighting line, to the windward of the hollow in which the games had been held.

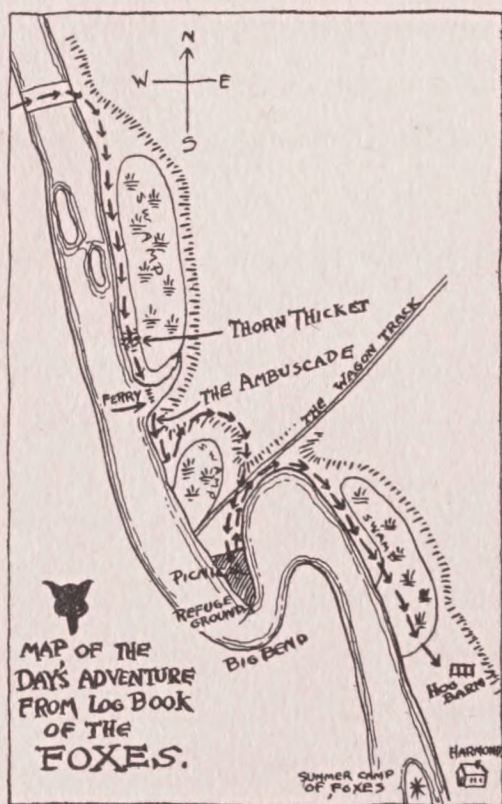
Then the Foxes, bearing brands from the council fire, raced

from side to side of the point, and soon a second wave of flame was in motion, sweeping away from them—preparing their place of refuge.

But many minutes must pass before the strip of smoking ashes ahead would be cool enough to be stepped on and wide enough to keep the flames at their rear at a safe distance.

All depended on the staying qualities of the scouts battling to keep the flames from leaping that narrow wagon track.

Soon another danger became apparent, the second fire, it was true, was speeding forward before the wind but it was also creeping back toward them through the close-packed fern.



IX.

OUT OF THE FLAMES.

"We girls musn't let the boys do all the fighting," called Ellen Gilmor, and slipping off the heavy woolen skirt she wore, used it to beat out a blaze kindled near the frightened group.

In a moment a score more had followed her example and the fighting force was increased by half.

They had enough to do to beat out the little spark-fires kindled in the rear of the main fighting line.

The Foxes raced from point to point, beating down the back fire.



Nor were evidences that the fight at the wagon track was going against the troop lacking. Every now and then an exhausted scout, sick from inhaling smoke, would reel back among the girls, lie for a moment with his face to the ground, where the smoke was least, and then stagger back to the fighting line.

A girl's cotton petticoat caught fire but before it could harm her Red Nichols sprang upon her with a rush which knocked her down, and rolled her over and over until the flames were beaten from the cloth.

Helpless, blinded by a puff of ashes which struck his eyes, a "Rabbit" was led from the battle front and turned over to the girls for such first aid treatment as they could give him. Other scouts, nearly asphyxiated by the smoke, were dragged in and laid beside him.

"We're losing ground," was the message Mr. Peters sent Con.

"You've got to hold it five minutes longer," was the answer.

They did.

How they did it will always be a mystery, and most of all to those who stuck to the finish of those choking, gasping, deadly five minutes.

Coats long since charred to cinders, they faced the flames with their bare hands. Then some one rushed along the line, passing to them skirts collected from the girls.

These served to beat down the flames for a moment, but too many of them were of such flimsy material that they caught fire themselves.

And no sooner was the enemy beaten back at one point than it crossed the road at another.

Three times the sumac patch caught fire and three times the Squirrels put it out.

The Rabbits were outflanked by the fire, which caught the thick hazel brush which fringed the river on their side, and were compelled to fall back.

The sumac patch flared into flame again.

A birch tree in front of the Gophers fell forward, a mass of fire, making a bridge across the road for the blaze behind it.

When the weakened fighters threw their full force upon this last peril, the fire crossed the road at a dozen other points. The Foxes charged to the rescue, with them half a dozen of the boldest girls.

"Run for it," gasped Con, "you're almost cut off."

And at last they turned and ran, escaping the encircling flames by the pathway the girls and the Foxes had beaten in order to reach them.

There was need of speed. The fern was thoroughly alight and though it did not make so lasting a fire as the dry scrub oak, the flames ran faster through it. So thick was the smoke that the fleeing scouts could not see one another at two yards' distance and they were compelled to hold their breath as if under water.

Fifty yards under such conditions may mean more labor and suffering than an ordinary mile run.

Con ran with the rest, but always with the figure of Ellen Gilmor in sight before him. His boyish admiration for a pretty face and bright manner had grown in the last heated half hour with the discovery that she could think quickly and act bravely.

Suddenly she tripped and fell. Con's brain was reeling with the collapse of exhaustion as he stopped beside her and—bashfulness forgotten—gathered her up in his arms, surprised even in that moment of excitement to find that so little a girl could be so heavy.

Blood pounding at his temples, he staggered forward with his burden, safely twenty yards away.

Dimly he was aware of shouts and screams in the murk before him as the routed picnic party rushed madly to the burned-over ground; of Shout yelping with pain; of the troop bugle blowing a gasping assembly to guide stragglers to safety; of Mr. Peters' hoarse voice ordering every one to lie down to escape the worst of the smoke.

Then he found his legs no longer hampered by the knee deep fern and his feet upon warm ashes.

He had reached the refuge ground but the hot blast from behind which scorched his neck told him how narrow had been his escape.



Desperately seeking air for his unconscious burden and himself, he swerved sharp to the right and reached the river's bank. There he flung himself down, shielding the girl's body from the hot cinders which rained upon them, with his own.

A hat full of water thrown upon her hair saved it from the threatening sparks.

Though fiery, the ordeal was brief. The fern burned like powder, with a flame sufficient to scorch the life out of any one caught in it, but it burned almost as quickly. At the edge of the burned space prepared by the Foxes the fire flared up in final fury and then sank down to rapidly dying embers. The blaze on the point was over while the scrub oak inland was still a mass of glowing coals and leaping flame.

The air cleared rapidly of smoke.

"Why, it's cold," said a voice beside Con, and he turned to find that he was kneeling with one arm around a wet-haired Topsy of a girl, her face one smudge of soot, her crimson sweater turned dark brown with dirt, and a badly scorched under skirt completing her costume.

"Topsy" sat up somehow, without displacing the arm which Con, blushing fire-red through his mask of cinders, lacked either the power or the inclination to withdraw.

"And it's snowing," said Ellen, and snuggled a little closer—if any girl should happen to read this it is for her to say whether this was because of the cold.

"And wasn't it a bully adventure," she went on, "and I'm glad it was you who carried me out safe."

The still speechless Con found his blistered paw in the grasp of two small hands.

X.

CAUGHT IN A BLIZZARD.

"Praise God from Whom all blessings flow"——

Husky, smoke-choked voices rose in the grand old hymn of thanks further down the point and guided Con and Ellen, still hand in hand, over the charred ground, between scorched tree trunks, through the thickly falling snow, to the rest of the party.

A strange world, doubly strange Con dimly felt, because of something left behind forever in that blackened, fire-wrecked wood. All he knew was that he no longer feared the girl beside him, but had found in her a comrade, a comrade somehow more close to him than even the tried companions of his patrol.



And for this newer friend's sake he knew that he must press on faster toward the bright goal of honor; must walk more straightly on the trail of truth and so be a little less unworthy of the friendship promised him by that hand-clasp.

"Hi, look there," Mat Gilmor shouted, with true brotherly brutality, "look at those two hand-holders. Been spoonin' in the smoke, you two?"

Con's anger flared up, but the girl's quick tact averted a quarrel between the two over-strung boys.

"Forget it, Mat," she said. "I fell down and fainted back there in the fire and smoke and Con carried me out, and after the way you ran off and left me, I'm just hanging on to the only scout I can trust to take care of me. What's more, just as soon as I get my face clean enough to make it worth while, I'm going to give him a kiss—which is more than you'll get for the way you welcome a sister who came near getting as badly burned as one of your pancakes."

Loud laughter greeted the evident dismay with which Con heard this promise, and Mat, regardless of his sister's protest, swung her up on his shoulder while he led three rousing cheers for Con.

These were followed by cheers for the girls, for the troop, for Mr. Peters and for the snowstorm.

Brought up in a small town, where "everybody knew everybody from grandfathers down," there was much of hearty goodfellowship and nothing of silly sentimentality in the relations of the boys and girls gathered for this eventful picnic, and Ellen's frank adoption of Con Colville went at its true value as one of those honest boy and girl friendships which obtain in such favored communities.

But cheer as they might, an impartial outsider would have seen little cause for rejoicing in the scorched and shivering party assembled on the point. They were still the prisoners of the fire, which continued to burn in the wide brush field inland. Driven before a biting north wind, the snow was settling around them like a blanket. The Ojibway troop could not muster a

whole coat between them. More than half of the girls had sacrificed their skirts to fire-fighting. The plight of the soundest of them was far from enviable and there were those who suffered with serious burns.

Wrapped in the few blankets which had escaped the hands of the fire-fighters, a half-dozen scouts lay on the bare ground. Around another, Frank Marshal of the Wolf patrol, a group worked to restore his smoke-choked lungs by artificial respiration. Red Nichols lay biting his scorched lips till they bled, to keep back the groans his blistered arms wrung from him. Across his legs lay Scout, moaning pitifully as Phil Saunders smeared his blistered paws with white ointment. "Fatty Felix" was laughing hysterically in an effort to conceal the agony his scorched head felt, now the excitement was passed. Ran Henderson of the Squirrels, was very white under his soot from loss of blood from a wound inflicted by his own hatchet while chopping at the sumac patch. Two others, youngsters of the Doves, actually slept the sleep of exhaustion.

Those who stood were in hardly better condition. The tonic of excitement and the heat of the fire gone, they shivered 'till their teeth chattered and their knees knocked together as the wintry wind struck their coatless bodies.

"Well, we certainly are having a lot of weather," said Tom Coleman's mother, and the shivering party laughed at the joke.

"Wouldn't be bad weather, either, if we could only strike an average between that fire and this snowstorm," put in Eddie Austin.

In the hollow the council fire was rekindled with wood from high branches, which had escaped the flames of the burning

fern. The sick and injured were borne to its side with tender care. The well huddled about it for comfort.

A scouting party from the Gophers reported that the fire still raged up river, creeping up against the wind despite the blinding fall of snow.

"But on the down-river side it's burnt out," said their leader, "and the snow has cooled off the ashes."

"We can't stick it out here, that's certain," said Mr. Peters. "We'll have to keep moving if we don't want to freeze and we might as well be moving somewhere as be running around in circles here. Maybe we can make the Harmond farm. At least we can reach woods which have not been burned out and find material for brush shelters. Pity all this fern is gone, it would have made fine thatch."

So move it was. The injured were carried on stretchers to make which, coats being lacking, a dozen self-sacrificing scouts gave up their shirts. The rest bowed before the blast and trudged along, hardly seeing the ground beneath their feet in the blinding smother of that terror of the northwest, the blizzard.

They were moving away from home, but even if the fire had not barred their way north, they could hardly have faced the storm, scantily clad as most of them were.

The slow procession moved on and must keep moving until it found shelter or dropped with cold and exhaustion.



XI.

THE DARKEST HOUR.

Courage is either of many kinds or else there are many things which pass as courage. Pride and anger sent the Foxes charging up the bluff beyond the ferry in that fierce but almost forgotten fight on the morning of this same day; the desperate instinct of self-preservation would have served the scouts of the Ojibway troop for their battle with the flames.

But neither anger nor desperation could have served the troop and its convoy in the plight in which they found themselves half an hour after commencing their march down stream in search of shelter. There were neither laughter, cheering nor sharp, shouted orders to urge them on.

Yet no one faltered or complained. Frail girls, whose low shoes and thin stockings were no protection from the drifted



snow and whose once gay garments gave little shelter from the cold, struggled on in dim procession; scouts worn out with fighting fire summoned an unguessed extra strength from somewhere in their souls to aid them. The injured in the litters bore in silence the double punishment of cold and burns.

To the Foxes Mr. Peters had assigned the task of finding the way and they stumbled on in the van while the scout master, with the Panthers, brought up the rear to see that no one straggled from the line and was left to lie perishing in the storm.

Ole Sorenson stumbled over a pile of stones.

"It's the oven we built to roast corn when we came down river after wild grapes last fall," he said, after feeling them over.

"Only half a mile below the point," was Tom Coleman's comment. He laughed bitterly at the slowness of their progress.

"Harmond's old hog barn is only a quarter of a mile ahead," said Eddie Austin. "We might make ourselves pretty comfortable there. It's a cinch these girls can't go much further."

"Land between is always pretty marshy," said Charlie McGregor, "bet it's flooded now."

"Well, if it is, the fire won't have reached the barn," said Con. "Do you guess the girls can stand to do some wading?"

"Anything to get some place where we can sit down and rest," was Mrs. Coleman's answer—the Foxes, like all the rest of the scouts, had each a girl in charge, to see that she kept moving and did not stray into the blinding blizzard.



AROUND THE FIRE AT
THE SHELTER



"Tom, I spent a lot of time walking the floor with you when you were a baby, do you think you could carry me through this marsh now?"

"Surest thing you know, mother," was the prompt answer. "I'm big enough to do that all right, or to spank you if you holler, just as I bet you used to whale me."

And suiting the action to the word, he picked up his mother and started ahead at a trot.

"Easy there, Tom," cautioned Con. "Don't run away from us for we're too tired to hunt you up if you get lost. Wait 'till you get to the marsh.

They had not far to go. Con, "feeling" ahead for the trail, which he followed part by instinct, part by the sense of trodden ground under his feet and most by the sullen murmur of the river at his right hand, felt the crackle of skim ice under his feet and then cold water pouring through his leggins.

"Pass the word down the line," he called back into the storm. "Prepare to wade. We're nearing shelter."

Then, with a proud thrill at his new-found boldness, he turned to pick up Ellen Gilmor, but she evaded his arm only to step close and whisper in his ear:

"Take Arne Henderson, poor little thing, she's all in and has fallen down half a dozen times. There are more girls than scouts here anyhow and some will have to wade."

Taking orders was a rather strange, but not unpleasant, sensation to Con and, as bidden, he lifted up the shivering little Henderson girl and started forward.

The going was desperately hard. The half frozen water chilled to the bone. Underfoot the ground was full of hum-

mocks and stumbles, even falls in which both scout and girl went down into the water, were not uncommon along the line.

In places the water was knee-deep and Con shivered an extra shiver for the girl wading bravely beside him.

"Had he been mistaken in his guess where they were? In such a blinding storm a mistake would be easy—and in their present case fatal to some. Would this flooded marsh never end—it should not be more than three hundred yards wide at the most?"

Such were the thoughts which tormented Con as he led the way. All he could do was to keep as straight a course as he could and hope that ultimately he would run up against high ground.

The weight of the girl in his arms seemed to be tearing them from their sockets. The snow, driven by the wind against his back had long since soaked through his undershirt—his thick outer garment was a part of the stretcher on which Red Nichols, Scout clasped close to his breast for his own warmth and the comfort of the suffering little dog, was being borne somewhere back in the sad procession behind him.

Con's physical sufferings were no greater than those of any other in the party, but the added anguish of responsibility made him groan aloud.

His was that darkest hour which always comes before the dawn.

Determined to keep in touch with his only guide, the river, he bore sharply to the right and nearly stumbled into deep, running water. Cautioning those in reach of his voice and bidding them pass the word along, he plunged forward again

and hardly a minute later felt firm ground beneath his feet. A few yards further and he was brought up standing by a high, "hog-proof" fence of barbed wire.

"The barn's inland, to our left, about two hundred yards," called Ole.

With a last effort of his tortured arms Con lifted Arne Henderson over the obstruction and then gently dropped her on the far side. To climb himself and stand ready to receive Ellen and some other girl, whom he could not recognize in the storm and darkness, was the work of an instant.

So they passed the formidable fence, each scout lifting a girl over, climbing himself and then pausing to receive a girl from the scout behind him.

A glad hail from the left announced that the head of the column had reached the longed for shelter.

Five minutes later, Mr. Peters, like the good leader he was, last to seek shelter strode up and took charge.



XII.

A SAFE GUIDE.

"It was awful, but glorious," said Mrs. Coleman. She sat wrapped in a blanket and leaning back on Tom's strong shoulder. "I can see how you boys love it and are always impatient to go back for more. It's the woods instinct which is so strong in all we American people. My great-grandfather went into Kentucky with Daniel Boone and he followed Clark in his march to Vincennes. I fancy that this comes out in Tom and I'll warrant that not one of you boys but can trace his folks back to the pioneer stock."

Mr. Harmond's "hog barn" had been built many years before to shelter a large herd of swine, kept a mile from the house, in just such storms as this. Its heavily timbered roof was only four feet above the ground, it was open to the south along the whole front but at the back was heavily banked with earth. Nearly a hundred feet long and eight feet wide it offered ample shelter to the whole party. Each of the seven patrols had a big fire blazing in front of the section assigned to it and, despite the blizzard which howled in baffled rage above them, all were comfortable and cheerful.

The elements, in long years of disuse, had purified the "barn," great armfulls of fodder corn from a nearby field

made a comfortable bed and a working party had brought in most of a big pile of cord wood in to feed the fires.

Once on the Harmond farm, their summer stamping ground, the scouts of the troop had been able to find their way to supplies whose existence was already known to them, using the fences for their guides.

Only imperative "orders" had kept Con from heading the mixed patrol which felt its way along a mile of fence to the farm house. Once there it had been able to send a reassuring message by rural telephone to be passed around among anxious parents in town and to arrange that teams be sent out in the morning to bring in the whole party. Meanwhile, hospitable Mrs. Harmond had stripped her house of everything which might add to the comfort of her storm-blown guests and Mr. Harmond, his husky grandson and two hired men had helped carry a great supply of blankets, robes, rugs and even carpets to the hog barn.

"Nobody ever catches cold so long as he keeps moving," was Mr. Peter's assurance when Mrs. Coleman expressed the fear that some of the girls at least must have suffered a dangerous chill. Events proved that his statement was correct.

With the elasticity of youth and health all of the party had regained their spirits and were prepared to pass a merry evening in their novel surrounding. By contrast with the dangers and hardships through which they had passed to gain it, their present rude comfort gave a pleasure which no amount of easily obtained luxury could have afforded them.

Even those suffering with burns were able to share the fun. Wrapped in all the available blankets, they had suffered



less on the march than those able to walk and their bodies, clean and well conditioned with outdoor life, responded rapidly to the few simple remedies which their injuries demanded and which the first aid kits, carried by each patrol, supplied in plenty.

Probably Scout, whose four feet were cruelly blistered from a dash through the embers of the council fire when called to follow the retreat before the onrushing flames, was the most seriously hurt of all the wounded. But his trust, as his affection, was with those who tenderly cared for his hurts and he submitted to ointment and bandages with a feeble wag of the tail which doubtless meant:

"It's up to you, fellows, go as far as you like. I know you're all friends of mine and will bring me around alright."

Fortunately the packsacks, to which they had clung through all their troubles, contained provisions ample for a couple more meals, so there was no more hunger than cold in the camp.

"I recollect how spring behaved like this back in '74," said Mr. Harmond as he squatted with the Panthers before their fire. "Three times the ground was bare and dry and three times we had just sech a blizzard as this."

The Doves, who esteemed themselves some vocalists, were singing at their fire and the girls with them added their voices to the song.

Further down the line champions from the Rabbits and

Wolves were pitted against each other in "Kim's game," a contest where a score or more small articles are exposed to the view of the contestants for a half-minute and then covered while each player makes a list of as many as he can remember—the longest correct list winning.

At the Gophers' fire the scouts carefully demonstrated the dozen or so knots and splices every good scout should know to a group of girls who sat with their bare feet tucked under them while their stockings hung steaming before the fire.

Altogether it was a picture of peace and contentment which Mr. Peters reviewed as he made a trip of inspection from one end of the long shed to the other, sitting down at last before the fire shared by the Squirrels and Foxes—really two rousing fires lengthened out 'till they became one.

He gave a sigh of relief, for though his career as the scout-master of a troop whose talent for getting into trouble was only surpassed by its genius for getting out again had hardened him, the day had been so strenuous as to shake even his iron nerve.

"They're great, Mrs. Coleman," he said, "great. Take that boy of yours. I don't believe there is a thing he don't dare undertake and what's more, he's no more afraid of hard work than he is of danger."

Mrs. Coleman flushed with pride at this praise of her son. "I've always hoped he would prove himself the right sort, but well as he may do I fear he has little chance to distinguish himself in this troop for, as you say, Mr. Peters, they're all great.

"But I firmly believe that, after all is said, it's to you we owe our lives today, for without your training, without disci-

pline, they would never had been able to hold back that fire however brave and determined they might have been."

"Well, they manage to do pretty well without me, some of them," said Mr. Peters. "Of course Tom has told you what he and the other Foxes did up north last winter. Perhaps, if you ask, he will tell you of a battle they fought to clear our path for us today. Which reminds me—

"Con, do you guess the Slabtowns had anything to do with starting that fire in the brush?"

But Con neither heard nor answered. He was sitting a little apart with Ellen Gilmor. Mr. Peters heard him say:

"No, you don't tip-toe to go quietly. You keep your weight on the foot that's planted 'till the other feels out a spot where it can be set down silently. Moccasins are—

"So the boy becomes a man," said Mr. Peters to Mrs. Coleman.

"She should be a safe, sweet guide on that dangerous trail," said Mrs. Coleman.

(The End)

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